

Bira Kalinga, Swatantra Odisha

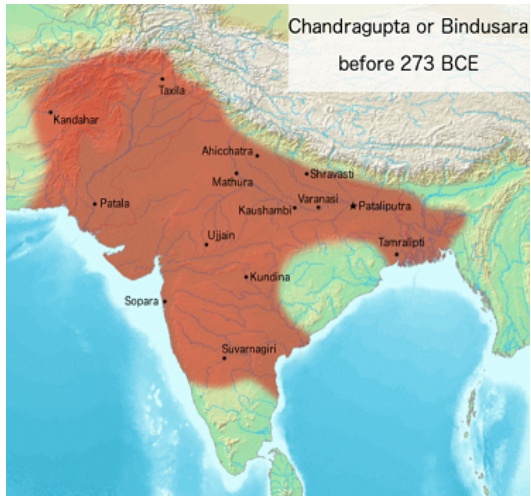
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Kalinga warriors: Sculpture from Konark Temple

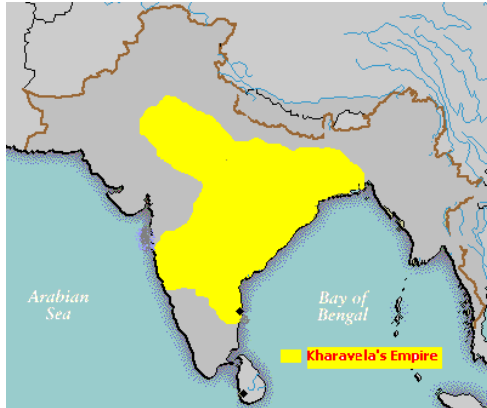
Where does Odisha stand now in India? What is its position in terms of economy and human development? As of end of 2019, Odisha's human development index (HDI) was 0.606, 32nd among all the Indian states. Which is below the national average of 0.645. Odisha's per capita income as of 2020-2021 was Rs. 1.15 lakhs, which was 26th among all the Indian states. Again well below the national average. Needless to say, Odisha currently can be termed as a (still) backward state in India, though it has progressed fairly well in the last couple of decades.

But was this always the case? Was Odisha a backward state or region always in history? The short answer is a resounding "*No*", "*Not at all*"! In fact let us go over some of the facts that describe the past glory of Odisha, generally compared to its neighboring regions. This is an attempt to prove the glorious past of our **Kalinga** (or Utkala) as it was called in the past. The idea is to be able to rekindle the greatness and the self respect in all Odia people to be able to understand who they actually are, how great their forefathers were.



Mauryan Kingdom of Bindusara (Father of Ashoka)

Most of you might already be aware of *Ashoka* the Great and his endeavors. You might be aware that it was the dream of Ashoka to conquer Kalinga and assimilate it to his empire. As it can be seen from the picture given above, *Ashoka's* father, *Bindusara*, had conquered almost all regions of India, except Kalinga. Kalinga stood firm against the Mauryan kingdom and remained an independent state until then. So *Ashoka* took it as his life's resolution to defeat Kalinga. In 261 BC, The **Kalinga war** was fought between *Ashoka's* army and Kalinga. The Kalingan army fought bravely till their last blood. Thousands preferred to die rather than surrender. In fact so much blood was spilled that the river *Daya* (in modern day Bhubaneswar) turned red with blood. Ashoka won the war, but the excessive violence allegedly changed his mind to turn away from wars and take the route of Ahimsa. Following the conquest of Kalinga, Ashoka ended the military expansion of the empire.



Empire of Kharavela

However Kalinga did not remain under the Mauryan Kingdom for long. In the 1st century BCE, **Mahameghavahana** dynasty was established by Mahameghavahana. The 3rd king of this dynasty, **Kharavela the Great**, extended his empire by defeating the Mauryan kingdom and merged it to the Kalinga empire. Kharavela ruled over a great part of India as shown in the image above. He has been noted as the strongest king of the Kalinga empire and a true source of Kalingan pride. Kharavela restored many artifacts taken away by Mauryan kings back to Odisha.

The next kingdom of great significance was the **Eastern Ganga Dynasty** which ruled over Odisha between 6th Century AD and 15th Century AD. The ganga rulers were extremely powerful and efficient rulers. The dynasty consisted of the whole of the state of Odisha as well as major parts of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. They are great in people management and built many temples such as Puri Jagannath temple and Konark Sun temple. Under the Ganga rulers, the Odisha culture thrived and reached great heights. Narasimhadeva 1st, the son of Anangabhimha, invaded Bengal in 1243, defeated its Muslim ruler, and captured the capital (Gauda), and built the Sun Temple at Konark to commemorate his victory.

During the medieval era however, India was plagued by Islamic invasions. The invaders were ruthless, persistence and had the sole aim to destroy the ancient hindu culture and establish Islam in all of India. Centuries after centuries, 7th century onwards. They plundered

India's wealth, destroyed temples and killed many hindus. Indians fought bravely, but gave up slowly and steadily. Around beginning of the 12th century AD there were many regions of India that were under muslim rule. But Kalinga remained a hindu kingdom under the great kings of Ganga dynasty.

There were many attacks on Odisha mostly from the Bengal Sultanate from 13th century AD until 16th century. These attacks were done for a sole purpose, to destroy hinduism from Odisha and establish islamic rule. There were many attacks of such nature to destroy the Puri Jagannath Temple, famously by the notorious generals like *Kala Pahad* and *Lal Beg*, the father of famous jagannath bhakta *Sal Beg*. But the Odia kings fought against them with a lot of conviction, with full bravery. The great Paika warriors of Odisha, fought in the name of Jagannath to ward off many such attacks. Odisha could remain independent right until 1567, when Gajapati raja Mukunda Deva finally lost to the infamous general of Bengal sultan, *Kala Pahad*. Such continuous resistance to islamic forces can also be seen in Assam wherein the great Ahom kings defended their state against Mughal and other islamic invaders. Even in the 17 century Odisha remained a somewhat independent kingdom as a vassal state to the Mughals as shown in the map below from 1640.



Map of India in 1640 AD, Showing Independent Odisha

Odisha has been blessed by many great individuals, both brave and able. Odisha was able to ward off **Islamic invasion** for approximately 400 long years (between 13th - 16th centuries) and the result of this is in front of us. Neighboring West Bengal hardly has any historical temples or structures standing whereas Odisha is full of ancient Temples. This is because most of those ancient structures have perished during their Islamic rule. Odia kings in the meantime were able to save our culture and Hinduism. Our Lord Jagannath is not only a symbol of Hinduism, but also a symbol of our Odisha itself, our emotion, our pride. Our temples are a reminder to all of us of our glorious past. Our past is a reminder to all of us the greatness of our ancestry, a reminder of who we actually are; resilient, strong, and independent. Let us hope Odisha discovers itself again and scales to even greater heights. *Jai Jagannath!*

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